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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: QUESTIONING THE UNQUESTIONABLE? UPTICK IN ONLINE
ANGER AT ROYALS AS THAI ARMY, POLICE ADDRESS LESE MAJESTE

REF: A. BANGKOK 3289 (THAILAND IN TRANSITION)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3080 (QUEEN SHOWS SUPPORT)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2344 (FURTHER LESE MAJESTE ACCUSATIONS)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 1949 (LEADING UNIVERSITY)
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 1662 (LESE MAJESTE ACCUSATIONS)
[1](#)F. BANGKOK 966 (AMBASSADOR MEETS JUSTICE MINISTER)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Online and open public criticism of Thai royals, particularly of Queen Sirikit, has increased recently. Army Commander Anupong Paojinda issued a public warning October 27 that the Army would take unspecified steps against people committing lese majeste, or offense to the monarchy. A high-ranking Royal Thai Police official publicly referred to 32 ongoing lese majeste investigations by his bureau, although the total number of cases in process nationwide is greater. Pro-Thaksin activist Jakrapob Penkair told us that he and others are actively seeking to shape perceptions of the monarchy in order to facilitate transforming the institution into a more ceremonial one after the death of King Bhumibol. Two United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) figures accused of lese majeste have been detained for months without bail, causing several other activists to leave Thailand out of concern they, too, might be arrested.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: The Army Commander's statement indicates that lese majeste offenses are not viewed simply as criminal acts but as a threat to Thailand's supreme institution. The rise in high-profile lese majeste cases, the frequency of online remarks bordering on lese majeste, and the seriousness of the authorities' response indicates that some segments of society are highly dissatisfied with the behavior of some members of the royal family, if not the institution itself. If the authorities were to harshly repress critics of the monarchy, this could prove counterproductive, as quiet discourse in many circles could shift from mere gossip about some royals' distasteful behavior to a more weighty questioning of the monarchy's role after the death of widely-beloved King Bhumibol (ref A). Septel will provide updates on higher profile lese majeste cases currently underway. End Summary and Comment.

ROYAL BEHAVIOR TO BLAME FOR SURGE IN CRITICISM?

13. (C) After Queen Sirikit presided over the October 13 funeral of a People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protestor killed during an October 7 clash with police (ref B), public criticism of the Queen increased notably. Thanapol Eawsakul, editor of left-wing Same Sky Magazine, told us that critical online comments posted to his website spiked, and overall traffic to his site increased from 10,000 hits per day to 30,000 hits.

14. (C) Thanapol, who has been charged with lese majeste for material previously published in Same Sky (ref E), told us he spent much of his time cleansing his website of content that could lead to further lese majeste accusations, such as: nude photos of the Crown Prince's consort, including video clips of an infamous birthday party (ref C); multiple postings ranting about the Crown Prince's lewd sexual behavior; photos (that Thanapol suspected to be digitally edited) of the Queen wearing what appears to be a famous stolen Saudi blue diamond; and multiple links to other sites with purported evidence linking the royal family to the stolen Saudi jewelry (ref F). To his surprise, people even posted comments speculating about King Bhumibol's involvement in his brother's death, some going as far as to suggest that Bhumibol shot then-King Ananda. Posters also drew upon Forbes magazine's recent report claiming the King's assets topped \$35 billion, decrying the monarchy's wealth as a result of generations of extortion, and calling the upcoming royal funeral of the King's elder sister as a waste of taxpayer money.

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15. (C) BBC reporter Jonathan Head (protect), subject of an ongoing lese majeste investigation (ref D), spoke with us on November 3 from the northeastern province of Udon Thani, where he said people raged publicly against the Queen in a manner he had never witnessed before. "The Queen ripped up the rule book when she attended the (PAD) funeral," he said, adding that he remained uncertain how to incorporate recent interviews into future BBC reporting without becoming the subject of additional lese majeste investigations. Many of the people he interviewed in Udon Thani complained that the royal family had not devoted similar attention to three locals (whom we presume were members of the security forces) killed in recent violence by southern insurgents.

UDD SCRUTINIZED FOR LESE MAJESTE, WITH CAUSE

16. (C) Jakrapob Penkair, discussing his lese majeste case with us on October 3, said he expected to be convicted and imprisoned. This marked a change from mid-August, when he thought that legal action would ultimately stall short of a court conviction. He described his current efforts as focused on grass-roots education of Thai citizens, "preparing the way" for eventual royal succession on terms favorable to his political force. While others on the Thaksin team focused on near term political matters, his efforts were mid-term, using new media like the internet and old tactics like whisper campaigns in small town barbershops and beauty parlors, to frame the issue of the proper role of the monarchy in 21st century Thailand. Jakrapob envisioned a small, ceremonial institution as in Japan and Sweden. Jakrapob did not hide his disdain for the Queen when talking to us, and said that he was counting on her to overreach and overreact.

17. (C) Suspects associated with the pro-Thaksin UDD are receiving strict scrutiny. Police have denied bail to two UDD figures, prompting two others charged with lese majeste to flee abroad after police obtained warrants for their arrests. Assessing the seriousness of the alleged offenses

is difficult since in most cases, no public records of the offending remarks are available; any person or media outlet that reproduces the offending content would also be at risk for lese majeste charges. A credible NGO contact told us the tone of UDD figures' remarks was unusually strong, showing "open vengeance against the monarchy, scaring everyone."

ARMY INSERTS ITSELF IN THE LESE MAJESTE WATCH

¶18. (SBU) Army Commander General Anupong Paojinda warned Thai citizens of the dangers associated with criticizing the monarchy in a televised press conference on October 27. According to an English-language daily, Anupong said, "There must be no cases of contempt or disrespectful acts toward the monarchy. The Army will take action using every means against any person or group acting in contempt of or being disrespectful toward the monarchy." Anupong's remarks appeared to be a direct response to the recent increased criticism of the monarchy.

¶19. (SBU) Note: The Thai criminal code outlaws lese majeste, but there is no legal basis for the Army to take action against those committing that crime. The Constitution specifies, however, that the King concurrently holds the position of head of the Thai Armed Forces. The Internal Security Act does provide that the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), an interagency body headed by the Prime Minister with the Army Commander as his deputy, is supposed to, among other tasks, "encourage people to be aware of their duty in upholding nation, religion, and King."

¶10. (C) UDD co-leader Charan Ditthaphichai claimed to us that most lese majeste investigations involving UDD supporters resulted from the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) Task Force 6080, which focuses on offenses against the monarchy, reporting cases to Anupong, who then forwarded them to the police. Charan stated that Army Chief of Staff General Prayut Chan-Ocha, a close associate of the Queen, manages Task Force 6080 by virtue of his role as Secretary of

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ISOC.

POLICE DISCUSS 32 ONGOING LESE MAJESTE CASES

¶11. (SBU) In a rare public statement detailing police investigations of lese majeste, Police LTG Woraphong Chiewpricha, Commissioner of the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), disclosed to the press on October 29 that the CIB was investigating 32 lese majeste cases. The CIB had forwarded four cases, including Jakrapob's, to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for further consideration. Of the 32, 15 cases originated from website content, and two resulted from community radio programs. Our contacts believe that the CIB handles only a relatively small fraction of the number of lese majeste cases in progress; most cases are investigated by the police unit that receives a lese majeste complaint. The CIB tally appears to exclude cases in which figures are charged with other offenses tangentially related to the offending statements (e.g., if a community radio operator is charged for broadcasting without a permit).

PAD AND DEMOCRAT PARTY FUELING THE FIRE

¶12. (C) UDD supporter Suttachai Yimprasoet, a professor at Chulalongkorn University, claimed to us that the PAD seeks to use lese majeste provisions of law against the academics who provide intellectual leadership for the UDD, cooperating with Manager Media staff to scour newspapers and monitor public debates for lese majeste offenses by UDD supporters.

¶13. (C) Democrat Party MP Ong-art Klampaiboon told us on November 5 that the DP had compiled a list of 29

anti-monarchy websites on May 20 and demanded that ICT take further legal action. The Democrats, he said, also proposed to increase the length of imprisonment for lese majeste charges from the current three-year minimum to 12 years and to extend lese majeste charges beyond distributors of anti-monarchy material to include also recipients and enablers of such transmissions. Ong-art also confirmed that Democrat Party MP Phiraphan Sariratuipak had drafted a law to amend the Computer Crime Act 2005 to focus on website content that violates lese majeste provisions.

JOHN